

February-March 2009

#### **CROSS-CUTTING**

Women's Contributions to Afghanistan's **Development Honored:** March 8 marked International Women's Day, a holiday founded in 1911 to promote the economic, political, and social achievements of women. In Afghanistan, where many women still face poverty and discrimination, it is especially important to celebrate the obstacles they have overcome and to raise awareness about the need for gender equality.

Women now play an increasingly visible role in Afghan society, and USAID works to ensure a better future for Afghanistan's women, their families, communities, and country. To achieve this, USAID supports legal rights for women, helps them gain access to public services and jobs, builds their capacity, and encourages their inclusion in public life.



The Director of Women's Affairs in Uruzgan distributes gifts to 600 women at an event in the provincial capital.

PHOTO: USAID/PRT Tirin Kot

To honor the contributions made by Afghan women to the development of their country - and to educate the general public about women's rights -USAID/Afghanistan, Provincial Reconstruction Teams, and local governments hosted a series of celebrations throughout the country on March 7 and 8. Thousands of women and men from Kabul to Kandahar came together at the provincial level to discuss women's rights, education, and the need for gender equality.

#### Highlights of these events include:

Paktya: Approximately 200 women and 50 men, including Wolosi Jirga member Sharifa Zormati, attended a community celebration hosted by the provincial Director of Women's Affairs. Participants discussed the important role of women in society and speakers stressed the need for increased educational opportunities for girls. During the event, boys' and girls' choirs sang in honor of the women guests and students performed skits about women's rights.

Panjsher. Nearly 125 women gathered in Bazarak to discuss the economic, political, and social challenges – as well as the many achievements - of Panjsher's women. Several speakers addressed these issues, including



A girls' choir in Paktya sings in honor of Women's Day. PHOTO: USAID/PRT Gardez

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Roahila, a parliamentarian and former judge. At the end of the event, the Panjsher Director



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of Women's Affairs Miriam Panjshiri recognized Roahila as 'Panjsher's Woman of the Year' for her consistent efforts to better the lives of the province's women and girls.

*Uruzgan*: Celebrations in Uruzgan began with a roundtable discussion entitled "Progress for Women is Progress for All." In this conservative province, it was a rare chance for men and women to come together and discuss the need to educate girls and provide employment opportunities for women. The most important messages of the roundtable were echoed by all speakers: women are equal to men, and progress for women will benefit the entire community.

Later, Uruzgan Parliamentarian Sonia Barakzai addressed a group of 600 women at Tirin Kot Hospital – the largest gathering of Uruzgan's women in recent history – and distributed toiletries to the assembled crowd. One attendee said that while it was nice to receive a gift to commemorate the day, the real 'gift' was the gathering itself, where a large group of women could come together in a safe and comfortable environment.

#### **ECONOMIC GROWTH**

Afghan Businesswomen Conference Creates Economic Opportunities: Overcoming great obstacles since the fall of the Taliban, women now play an essential role in Afghanistan's economic development. In particular, women entrepreneurs have been a key driving force in the job creation and economic growth. To support women-owned businesses, the Afghan Women's Business Federation (AWBF) was formed by USAID in 2005 and now serves 82 women's business associations throughout Afghanistan. A number of innovative AWBF initiatives, such as a 'Made by Afghan Women' branding program for carpets, have raised the profile and success of Afghan businesswomen.



The Afghan Women's Business Federation's first annual conference was held on February 25.

PHOTO: USAID/ASMED

On February 25, AWBF held its first annual conference in Kabul, bringing together businesswomen, private sector partners, government officials, and representatives of international organizations. Entitled 'Growing Women's Business,' the conference was an opportunity for Afghan businesswomen to strengthen relationships, promote the importance of women entrepreneurship, and develop solutions to commonly faced obstacles.

At the event, attendees discussed the findings of a recent AWBF membership survey that identified common challenges facing women-owned businesses in Afghanistan. Some of the most pressing challenges include the lack of access to finance and the limited ability to

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conduct effective marketing. Participants developed strategies for AWBF to address those challenges through grants, improved financial services, specialized business training, new markets linkages, and other public advocacy efforts.

A number of programs to facilitate women's economic empowerment were unveiled at the conference, which will further strengthen women's entrepreneurship. The Dutch Embassy and the Governor of Uruzgan Province announced the launch of a program to assist women-owned businesses. The Government of Afghanistan, as well as the Export Promotion Agency of Afghanistan, the Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and corporate sponsors, also pledged support. These commitments will improve coordination among stakeholder efforts to develop women's businesses.

Parliament Approves Reduction in Real Property Transfer Tax: As the result of a USAID initiative, the Parliament of Afghanistan substantially reduced the real property transfer tax in February 2009. This important change is likely to increase formal registrations of real property transfers, strengthening governance and property rights. The outcome of a lengthy legislative and advocacy process, the amendment reduces the tax by 38-43% for property worth under/over Afs 1,000,000 (\$20,000), respectively. It is now awaiting Presidential enactment, which is expected to occur within the next few weeks.



Buyer's representative signs documents to privatize Hayratan Technical Services. PHOTO: USAID/LTERA

Privatizing State-owned Enterprises Leads to Economic Efficiency and Growth: After the fall of the Taliban, there remained a number inefficient state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Unable to make a profit or effectively offer products and services, these banks, businesses, and factories hampered economic growth and depleted vital government resources. Since 2004, USAID has worked to restructure and privatize the enterprises in a fair and efficient manner, ensuring that former state resources are purchased and managed effectively by the private sector.

In February, USAID oversaw the profitable sale of two state-owned enterprise properties in Kabul and Hayratan. Parcels of Samoon Dried Fruit Enterprise and Hayratan Technical Services Enterprise were sold to private sector buyers, who will transform the SOE properties into economically viable businesses. The new owners of Samoon Dried Fruit Enterprise will use the property as either a fruit drying facility or an aluminum factory, creating jobs and manufacturing products in high demand in today's Afghanistan.



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#### Roshan Telecom Promotes Corporate Philanthropy through Partnerships with USAID:

Roshan Telecom, Afghanistan's leading GSM mobile phone provider, celebrated International Corporate Philanthropy Day on February 23 by promoting its partnerships with USAID and other development organizations. With a text message sent to many of its 3 million subscribers, Roshan urged customers to visit its social programs website and contribute to development efforts in Afghanistan. USAID-Roshan partnerships featured on the website included the Women's Public Call Offices and the One Laptop per Child program, which provide women and children with economic and educational opportunities.

Roshan's text message: In celebration of International Corporate Philanthropy Day, Roshan invites you to join the reconstruction effort, please visit <a href="https://www.roshan.af/socialprograms">www.roshan.af/socialprograms</a>.

#### ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND AGRICULTURE

Mazari Sharif International AgFair and Cashmere Exhibition Creates New Business Opportunities:

From March 12-13, the Mazari Sharif International AgFair and Cashmere Exhibition promoted Afghanistan's produce, livestock, and cashmere on the world stage. Approximately 27,500 members of the agricultural sector, business community, government, and international organizations attended the event, which was held to build awareness of agriculture in Afghanistan, link buyers and sellers, and boost sales of Afghan products nationally and internationally. The AgFair provided the opportunity to exchange ideas on increasing agricultural production and agribusiness in Afghanistan, as well as to learn about improved farming practices and technology.



Women spin cashmere thread at the Mazari Sharif AgFair and Cashmere Exhibition. PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

The AgFair also hosted a cashmere exhibition, showcasing Afghanistan's growing cashmere industry. Afghanistan is the world's third largest producer of cashmere and has the potential to increase production significantly, bringing wealth and export opportunities to herdsmen and weavers. In addition to linking buyers and sellers, the AgFair featured demonstrations on harvesting, processing, and marketing cashmere, as well as tips on raising healthy goats.

Afghanistan has hosted eight AgFairs throughout the country since early 2007. Organized by USAID in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock; the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry; the Afghanistan Investment Support Agency; and the Export Promotion Agency of Afghanistan, the events have generated millions of dollars in business deals and have raised the profile Afghanistan's agricultural sector to the global level.

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Affordable Seeds and Fertilizer Reduce Afghanistan's Food Crisis: More than six million Afghans do not have enough to eat, partially due to drought. USAID, in partnership with the Afghan government and the private sector, is combating Afghanistan's food insecurity crisis by providing high-quality, subsidized wheat seeds and fertilizer to farmers in 14 northern and western provinces. As an alternative to direct food handouts, access to affordable agricultural supplies strengthens families, communities, and food economies by promoting local production, community decision-making, and farmer-supplier relationships.

Farmers are chosen according to need by teams of Afghan stakeholders at the local, provincial, and national levels. More than 10,000 farmers in Bamyan received seeds and fertilizer in February, and distributions in 13 other provinces have benefitted more than 241,000 farmers to date. With an average farmer household of 6 individuals, the program has improved the lives of nearly 1.5 million Afghans over the past four months.

Haji Kamal of Sari Pul is one of the drought-affected farmers that USAID has helped. "I have a shortage of seeds," Kamal says.



Haji Kamal received highquality seeds to increase his crop yield. PHOTO: USAID/AVIPA

"Our harvest has not paid off for two or three years, and we had to sell livestock to earn enough to eat. If I have good seeds, I can feed my family, and earn enough to live."

#### **DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE**

Launch of First Dari and Pashto Legal Glossary Aids Legal Professionals: A lack of legal reference materials has hampered the development of rule of law in Afghanistan. To provide Afghanistan's lawyers and judges with the resources they need to implement the law effectively, USAID, in partnership with Kabul University, the Supreme Court, and the Ministry of Justice, recently launched the first-ever Dari and Pashto legal glossary.



The glossary is the first of its kind in Afghanistan, and the only reference to include terms in both of the country's national languages. It offers users a common understanding of terminology unique to Dari- and Pashto-speaking legal professionals, who have previously relied on dictionaries published in other countries. The last glossary of legal terminology written in Afghanistan was published in 1972 and included only Dari and English references.

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The 4,000-term glossary is currently being distributed to legal professionals from the Supreme Court, Ministry of Justice, Attorney General's Office, courts, and law faculties throughout Afghanistan. Professor Nasrullah Stanekzai of Kabul University's Law and Political Science Faculty, praised the publication and said, "This glossary will go a long way toward easing problems caused by the lack of a legal glossary in Dari and Pashto."



An IT professional receives a training certificate from Judge Samiullah, advisor to the Supreme Court.

PHOTO: USAID/ARoLP

IT Training Facilitates Computerization of Afghanistan's Supreme Court: Over the past three years, computer use in Afghanistan's Supreme Court has increased dramatically, boosting productivity and improving information management. The Court now maintains up-to-date electronic personnel records on all judicial and non-judicial staff members throughout the country. To support this ongoing process, USAID sponsored an advanced IT training program for Supreme Court IT personnel to increase their professional capacity.

On March 5, 20 Supreme Court staff members graduated from the three-month program conducted at Iqra University. During the course, the Court staffers became proficient in

web design, database design, and network administration. Their new skills will lead the way for other computerization initiatives, such as electronic caseload management, ensuring that the Supreme Court delivers high quality justice services throughout Afghanistan.

Judge Halimi, head of the Supreme Court's Department of Finance and Administration, congratulated the graduates and remarked that "IT technology is essential for Afghanistan's future." In preparation for the implementation of the caseload management database, he asked that the graduates share their new expertise with judges and other Court employees.



Recently trained Kuchi youth are equipped to work as mechanics. PHOTO: USAID/LGCD

# PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAM Kuchi Youth in Zabul Learn Motorbike Repair:

Afghanistan's traditionally nomadic Kuchi population is underserved throughout the country, often lacking access to government services, healthcare, and education. In particular, its young people are in need of vocational training. To provide Kuchi youth with useful job skills and economic opportunities, USAID and the local government conducted a 10-week motorbike repair course for 22 students in Zabul. On March 3, all participants graduated and are equipped to work as mechanics.

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The Kuchi Department Director distributed tool kits to participants at the graduation ceremony and said, "Before implementation of this course and other recent community development projects for Kuchi youth, this population was entirely deprived of government services. Now that they have been given training through the government, they have gained access to work opportunities and developed positive attitudes towards the government in return."

The impact of the course is already visible, as a number of graduates are putting their training to practical use. Three graduates have already opened their own repair shops and are employing fellow graduates, creating needed jobs in the insecure province of Zabul. Several others have found employment in existing repair shops in the city of Qalat and are able to support themselves and their families.

**USAID Helps Vulnerable Families Weather the Winter:** Winter in Afghanistan is long and harsh, and many families are unable to buy warm clothing and fuel to keep warm. This winter, residents in Kunar and Khost, as well as 12 other provinces in southern and eastern Afghanistan, received essential supplies from USAID to help them survive the cold. Each kit contained items such as blankets, coats, and stoves, which were distributed to families through a fair process monitored by local officials.

The head of a large family in Khost expressed his relief to receive a winterization kit containing children's sweaters, blankets, a gas cylinder, and a jerry can to store water. "My occupation is farming, but I cannot earn enough to support a family of 12," he said. "My children were asking me for sweaters but I was not able to afford them. Thanks to the Government of Afghanistan, I am sure that my children will feel warm this winter and not feel deprived."



Kit distribution in Kunar. PHOTO: ISAF

In Kunar, where 1,000 kits were distributed in five remote districts, coordination with the local government was essential to transporting supplies to those most in need. The overarching winterization initiative, conducted in cooperation with the Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, district and provincial governments, and Provincial Reconstruction Teams, raises the legitimacy of local government by strengthening the delivery of services to constituents.

Thousands in Uruzgan Gain Access to Clean Water: The lack of clean water causes disease and poor harvests, and ultimately forces communities to migrate to new areas. To improve health and prevent the abandonment of homes, USAID recently constructed a

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series of water pumps and canals in Uruzgan Province, providing thousands of rural villagers with access to clean drinking water and irrigation.

Approximately 3,230 residents of Kuchkin, Surmurghab, and Salehzai villages can now obtain water through 11 hand pumps. A Kuchkin elder said, "We were in great need of clean drinking water. If not for these hand pumps, we would have migrated from this place as we used to do. We are truly grateful to have them." In addition, the construction of a canal in Khairabad provided crop irrigation and water for



A villager in Uruzgan uses a hand pump to get fresh drinking water. PHOTO: USAID/LGCD

2,100 villagers. One elder expressed his appreciation and said, "Our village now has enough water for irrigation and we are optimistic about a good harvest this season."

#### **USAID/Afghanistan Hosts Implementing Partners**'

Fair: On February 24, approximately 300 USAID/Afghanistan partners, staff, and U.S. and NATO military representatives came together at the Implementing Partners' Fair to share the impact of their projects throughout the country. In a colorful tent at the USAID mission in Kabul, partners displayed their program successes in the spheres of health, education, economic growth, democracy and governance, community development, infrastructure, and alternative development and agriculture. Sponsored by USAID's Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) office and attended by field officers from PRTs throughout Afghanistan, the fair highlighted the benefit to Afghans of projects from the social marketing of health products to providing veterinary care for livestock.



A booth at the Implementing Partners' Fair displays health products, such as oral rehydration salts, promoted by USAID. PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

Attendees enjoyed the unique opportunity to learn from one another and discuss ways to improve coordination between partners operating in Kabul and Afghanistan's diverse provinces. Andrea Muto, the Afghanistan Rule of Law Project's senior attorney/legal publishing, appreciated the networking aspect of the event and believes it will increase cooperation between implementing partners. "An event like the USAID Implementing Partners' Fair introduces us to new USAID contacts and even those in the donor community who discover our publications for the first time. These types of contacts are invaluable, especially in the provinces. All it takes is a new name and number, and we've a liaison in a hard-to-reach part of Afghanistan."